Research Paper | Education | E-ISSN No : 2454-9916 | Volume : 6 | Issue : 4 | April 2020

# MITIGATING THE RISK OF FATALITY THROUGH INCREASED UPTAKE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN AUSTRALIAN HIGH RISK OCCUPATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

This discussion paper firstly identifies high risk work occupations and industries utilising Safe Work Australia data and then profiles those engaged in these occupations. The profiles lead to an understanding of the educational background of those workers most at risk and allows identification of training gaps. A range of promotion and incentive mechanisms are presented that encourage skilling and upskilling in areas focusing on the knowledge and skills that may contribute to mitigating the risks associated with the identified mechanisms of injury fatality.

A range of stakeholders, including employers, training providers, industry skills councils and Government, are considered in terms of the contribution they can make in actively working toward reducing the occurrence of injury and fatality in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing and Transport, Postal and Warehousing industries as experienced by Machinery Operators and Drivers and Labourers.

**KEYWORDS:** vocational education, adult learning, health and safety, training.

**DISCUSSION:**

**Mechanism of Injury Focal Points:**

Safe Work Australia compiles the Work-related Traumatic Injury Fatalities data set. The data set provides national statistics on all workers and bystanders fatally injured at work (Safe Work Australia, 2020a). This data, for Work-related injury fatalities by mechanism of fatal injury, 2018, quantifies the mechanism of incident as shown in Table 1 below. Visually, Figure 1 shows the breakdown of the mechanism for the fatal injury as a percentage.

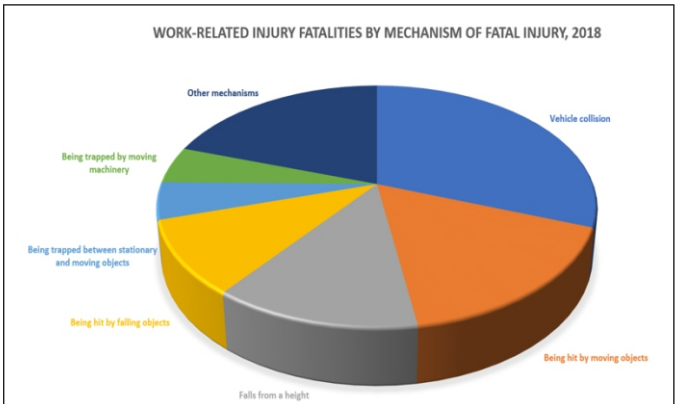


**Figure 1: Work-related injury fatalities by mechanism of fatal injury, 2018.**

**Table 1: Work-related injury fatalities by mechanism of fatal injury, 2018 (Safe Work Australia, 2020a).**

| Mechanism of incident | Number of fatalities | % of injury fatalities |
|---|---|---|
| Vehicle collision | 44 | 31% |
| Being hit by moving objects | 24 | 17% |
| Falls from a height | 18 | 13% |
| Being hit by falling objects | 15 | 10% |
| Being trapped between stationary and moving objects | 7 | 5% |
| Being trapped by moving machinery | 7 | 5% |
| Other mechanisms | 29 | 20% |
| Total | 144 | 100% |

The Safe Work Australia (2020a) data highlights the mechanisms most likely to cause injury and/or fatality in Australian workplaces, with vehicle collision to be the most likely, followed by being hit by moving objects.

Safe Work Australia (2020a) outlines that in the context of this data, vehicle collisions include fatalities that occurred as a direct result of a vehicle crash. Vehicles include not only road vehicles such as cars and trucks, but also machines such as aircraft, boats, loaders, tractors and quad bikes.

The Safe Work Work-related injury fatalities by occupation, 2018, data (Safe Work Australia, 2020b), outlines that Machinery Operators and Drivers and Labourers are the most likely occupations for work-related injury fatalities. This data is shown as Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Work-related injury fatalities by occupation, 2018 (Safe Work Australia, 2020b).**

| Occupation | Number of fatalities | Fatality rate (fatalities per 100,000 workers) |
|---|---|---|
| Machinery Operators and Drivers | 51 | 6.2 |
| Labourers | 36 | 2.9 |
| Technicians and Trades Workers | 27 | 1.5 |
| Managers | 16 | 1.0 |
| Professionals | 8 | 0.3 |
| Community and Personal Service Workers | 4 | 0.3 |
| Clerical and Administrative Workers | 1 | 0.1 |
| Sales Workers | 1 | 0.1 |
| Total | 144 | 1.1 |

Representing this data graphically highlights the degree to which the occupations of Machinery Operators and Drivers and Labourers are at risk, as shown in Figure 2.

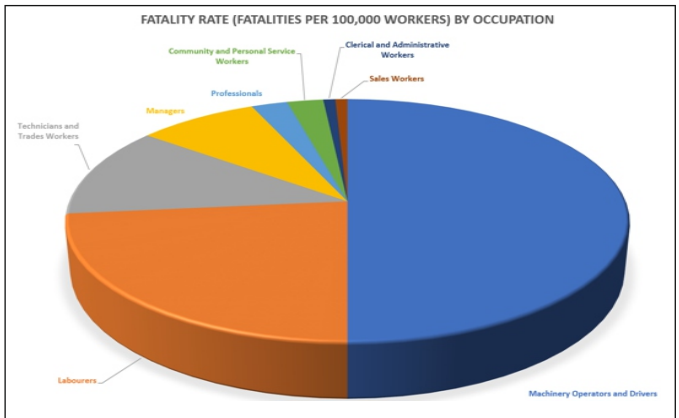


**Figure 2: Work-related injury fatalities by occupation, 2018.**

A third data set produced by Safe Work Australia worthy of consideration is related to work-related injury fatalities by industry, as tabled as Table 3. This data set illuminates that the highest fatality levels occur in the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing and Transport, Postal and Warehousing industries (Safe Work Australia, 2020b).

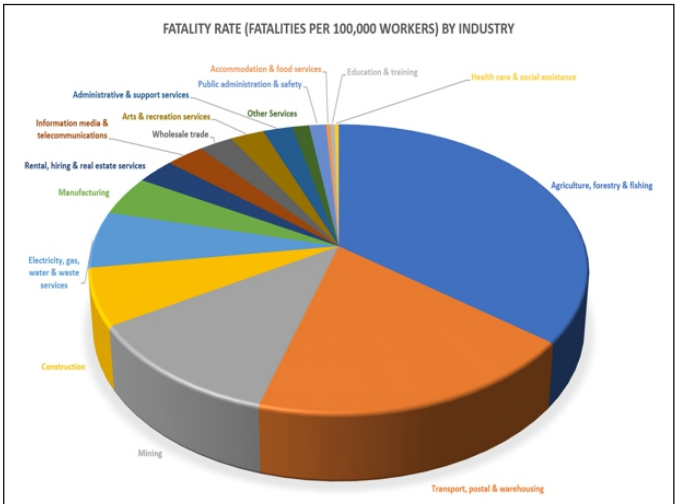


**Figure 3: Work-related injury fatalities by industry, 2018.**

**Table 3: Work-related injury fatalities by industry, 2018 (Safe Work Australia, 2020b).**

| Industry of employer | Number of fatalities | Fatality rate (fatalities per 100,000 workers) |
|---|---|---|
| Agriculture, forestry & fishing | 37 | 11.2 |
| Transport, postal & warehousing | 38 | 5.9 |
| Mining | 9 | 3.7 |
| Construction | 24 | 2.0 |
| Electricity, gas, water & waste services | 3 | 2.0 |
| Manufacturing | 13 | 1.4 |
| Rental, hiring & real estate services | 2 | 0.9 |
| Information media & telecommunications | 2 | 0.9 |
| Wholesale trade | 3 | 0.8 |
| Arts & recreation services | 2 | 0.8 |
| Administrative & support services | 3 | 0.7 |
| Other Services | 2 | 0.4 |
| Public administration & safety | 3 | 0.4 |
| Accommodation & food services | 1 | 0.1 |
| Education & training | 1 | 0.1 |
| Health care & social assistance | 1 | 0.1 |
| Retail trade | 0 | 0.0 |
| Professional, scientific & technical services | 0 | 0.0 |
| Financial & insurance services | 0 | 0.0 |
| Total | 144 | 1.1 |

Again, graphically, as shown in Figure 3, the fatality rate per 100,000 workers in the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing and Transport, Postal and Warehousing industries is apparent.

Considering this data in a superficial manner, it may be derived that risk of work-related injury fatality is highest for Machinery Operators, Drivers and Labourers working in the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing and Transport, Postal and Warehousing industries, with the most likely risk being related to vehicle collision or being hit by moving objects.

**Machinery Operators, Drivers and Labourers:**

Safe Work Australia (2020c) outlines that the nature of the work in the road transport industry makes it high risk and this is reflected in both the high rates of fatalities and serious workers' compensation claims. They highlight that on average, the industry recorded the highest fatality rate and accounted for the second highest number of fatalities over the last five years. The industry also recorded the highest frequency rate of serious claims. With regard to the industry demographics they point out that older workers accounted for the majority of worker fatalities in the road transport industry from 2013-2016, with workers aged 45 to 54 years accounting for the highest proportion (31 per cent) of the 156 workers killed in the industry.

The road freight transport sub-industry accounts for the majority of workers in the road transport industry, which is reflected in both the number of fatalities and serious claims and this sub-industry accounted for 92 per cent of fatalities and 82 per cent serious claims in the industry from 2013-2016. This aligns to the statistics identifying Drivers as a high risk occupation. Safe Work Australia (2020c) note that Truck Drivers accounted for the majority of fatalities (84 per cent or 131 fatalities over a four-year period) within the road transport industry, followed by automobile drivers (5 per cent or 8 fatalities). Data shows that vehicle incidents accounted for the largest proportion of fatalities (79 per cent) within the road transport industry, followed by being hit by moving objects (6 per cent).

Using the Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business Job Outlook data as a reference, a profile of a Truck Driver generally can be determined. Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business. (2020a) notes that the majority of the workers in this job role are aged 45 to 54 years old (29.8 per cent), followed by 35 to 44 (21.2 per cent) and only 3.6 per cent in the 20 to24 year old age group. Academically, the majority of Truck Drivers have completed Year 10 or below (41.6 per cent) and 26.8 per cent have completed vocational education qualifications at Certificate III or IV level. Table 4 outlines the percentage share of qualifications completed and also shown graphically as Figure 4.

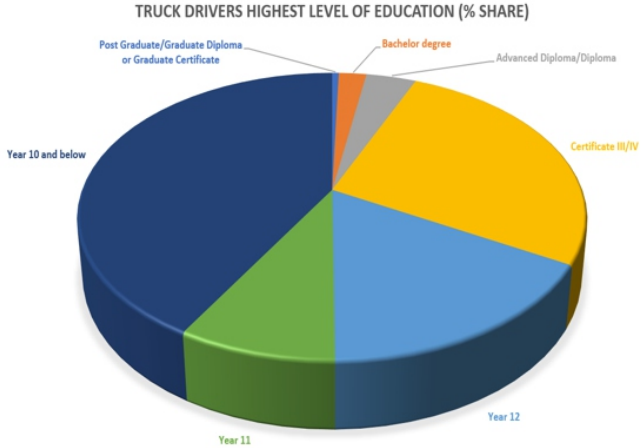


**Figure 4: Truck Drivers Highest Level of Education (% Share).**

**Table 4: Truck Drivers Highest Level of Education (% Share), ABS Census 2016, Customised Report. Highest qualification completed by workers in this job (in any field of study). Qualifications needed by new workers might be different from the qualifications of workers already in the job. Cited in Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business. (2020a).**

| Type of Qualification | Truck Drivers | All Jobs Average |
|---|---|---|
| Post Graduate/Graduate Diploma or Graduate Certificate | 0.5 | 10.1 |
| Bachelor degree | 2.1 | 21.8 |
| Advanced Diploma/Diploma | 3.8 | 11.6 |
| Certificate III/IV | 26.8 | 21.1 |
| Year 12 | 16.6 | 18.1 |
| Year 11 | 8.5 | 4.8 |
| Year 10 and below | 41.6 | 12.5 |

The Highest Level of Education (% Share) data highlights the low degree of vocationally qualified, through vocational education and training, truck drivers in the industry. The job role essentially requires Heavy Vehicle licencing, relevant to the type of truck being operated and may not require any other formal qualification. Some specific job roles may require additional certification such as construction induction card (white card) and/or forklift licence.

The Transport and Logistics Training Package specifies the competency standards for heavy vehicle licencing units, for example through the unit of competency TLILIC2016 Licence to drive a heavy rigid vehicle (Australian Government, 2020a). This unit is required to be completed to operate a heavy rigid vehicle, including a rigid vehicle, not being an unladen prime mover, with a minimum of three axles and a minimum 15 tonnes GVM or a modified three axle prime mover with a certified detachable tray (with capacity to carry 75% of its specified

GVM) with a GVM of 15 tonnes and holds dual registration (HC & HR) or a three axle articulated bus or a three axle bus above 15 tonnes GVM on public roads. Assessment of the unit is undertaken within a licensing examination conducted by, or under the authority of, the relevant state/territory driver licensing authority. Similar units exist for other heavy vehicle classes.

Many Registered Training Organisations deliver heavy vehicle licence training and assessment over one to two days, some with delivery and assessment on the same day. Learners are given very little time to develop competence over time and to consolidate their skills in this arrangement.

The TLILIC2016 Licence to drive a heavy rigid vehicle unit of competency comprises 3 Elements: Drive a heavy rigid vehicle; Monitor traffic and road conditions; and, Monitor and maintain vehicle performance. Across these, there are a total of 11 Performance Criteria. Very little of the unit components are designed to ensure work health and safety competence. The unit is designed to develop competence in vehicle collision avoidance or managing the risk of being hit by moving objects, the two most frequent mechanisms of incident causing fatality. There are, however, a number of qualifications that utilise the unit of competency, including (Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, 2020b):

- CPP30711 Certificate III in Waste Management
- RII30115 Certificate III in Surface Extraction Operations
- TLI21216 Certificate II in Driving Operations
- TLI42116 Certificate IV in Driving Operations
- TLI33416 Certificate III in Waste Driving Operations
- TLI33316 Certificate III in Furniture Removal
- TLI31216 Certificate III in Driving Operations
- TLI33418 Certificate III in Waste Driving Operations
- UEG20118 Certificate II in Gas Supply Industry Operations
- UEG30118 Certificate III in Gas Supply Industry Operations
- UEG40118 Certificate IV in Gas Supply Industry Operations
- FBP31018 Certificate III in Sugar Milling Industry Operations
- UET30619 Certificate III in ESI - Power Systems - Distribution Overhead
- UET30819 Certificate III in ESI - Power Systems - Distribution Cable Jointing
- UET30719 Certificate III in ESI - Power Systems - Rail Traction
- UET30519 Certificate III in ESI - Power Systems - Transmission Overhead

and the majority of these include Health and Safety specific units of competency that may adequately train and the required skills and knowledge to reduce, and hopefully prevent, fatality resulting from vehicle collision, being hit by moving objects, falls from a height, being hit by falling objects, being trapped between stationary and moving objects and being trapped by moving machinery. As an example, an individual completing the TLI31216 Certificate III in Driving Operations would have completed units of competency including: TLID1001 Shift materials safely using manual handling methods; TLIF1001 Follow work health and safety procedures; TLIF2010 Apply fatigue management strategies; and TLIL1001 Complete workplace orientation/induction procedures. These form part of the core units and the qualification requires a total of 18 units of competency for satisfactory completion. Providers are able to package the qualification to meet the relevant sub-industry and can include: TLID2004 Load and unload goods/cargo; TLIA3008 Transfer cargo; TLIF2006 Apply accident-emergency procedures; and any number of load or plant specific units covering heavy general freight, agitator, bus, refrigerated, pilot vehicle, dry/liquid, car carrier, livestock, wood products, dangerous goods, over dimensional and tip truck. These units of competency directly address the noted mechanisms of incident for this industry. Drivers, at the very least, must be provided with sufficient training to ensure that driving hours regulations (time spent driving and working) are adhered to, required rest breaks are taken, records of driving hours are correctly calculated and kept, vehicle does not exceed mass limits, vehicle and load do not exceed dimension limits, load is appropriately restrained, the speed limit is not exceeded, and all vehicle equipment is correctly functioning.

National Transport Insurance (2019) in its NTARC Major Accident Investigation Report outlines and discusses the causes of major accidents. They revealed that nearly one in three driver error crashes resulted from inadequate following distance which, in the majority of cases, then resulted in a 'ran into rear' crash. They also note driver fatigue and roll over during unloading resulting from incorrect procedures as causes of major accidents. Higher level training may address and prevent these causes in many cases.

The proposition of increased training in the transport industry aligns with the Australian Trucking Association (ATA) submission to the Senate road transport inquiry calling on Governments to implement practical safety measures immediately, to combat the unacceptable number of fatal and serious injury crashes involving trucks (Australian Trucking Association, 2020). The ATA condone improving driver training and licensing.

**Agricultural, Forestry and Fishing Workers:**

Safe Work Australia (2020c) notes that the nature of the work in the agriculture industry means it is a high risk industry and is reflected in the comparatively high rates of fatalities and serious workers' compensation claims. On average, the industry ranked second in terms of fatality rate and accounted for the highest number of fatalities over the last five years. Demographically, Older workers accounted for the majority of worker fatalities, with workers aged 65 and over accounting for over a third (36 per cent) of the 155 workers killed in the industry from 2013-2016.

Safe Work Australia (2020c) however note that younger workers were more likely to make a compensation claim for a serious injury or illness. Workers aged under 25 years had the highest frequency rate (14.5 serious claims per million hours worked), followed by workers aged 25 to 34 years (9.9 serious claims per million hours worked) from 2012-13 to 2015-16.

The Agriculture Priority industry snapshot outlines that while the sheep, beef cattle and grain farming sub-industry makes up approximately a third of the agriculture industry workforce, it accounts for almost two-thirds of worker fatalities and just over 40 per cent of serious claims (Safe Work Australia, 2020c). Other livestock farming accounted for the next highest proportion of fatalities (9 per cent) and fruit and tree nut growing accounted for next highest proportion of serious claims (11 per cent). Livestock farmers (managers) accounted for the highest proportion of worker fatalities (36 per cent or 57 fatalities over the four year period), followed by livestock farm workers (labourers) (11 per cent or 18 fatalities), and crop farmers (11 per cent or 17 fatalities).

Based on a the Job Outlook data, Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business. (2020b), the majority of Livestock Farmers are categorised into 3 main age groups: 25 to 34 (22.9 per cent); 35 to 44 years old (22.0 per cent); and 45 to 54 (21.6 per cent). Academically, the majority of these workers have completed Year 10 and below (34.5 per cent) and 19 per cent have undertaken vocational education and training at Certificate III or IV level, as outlined in Table 5 and Figure 5.

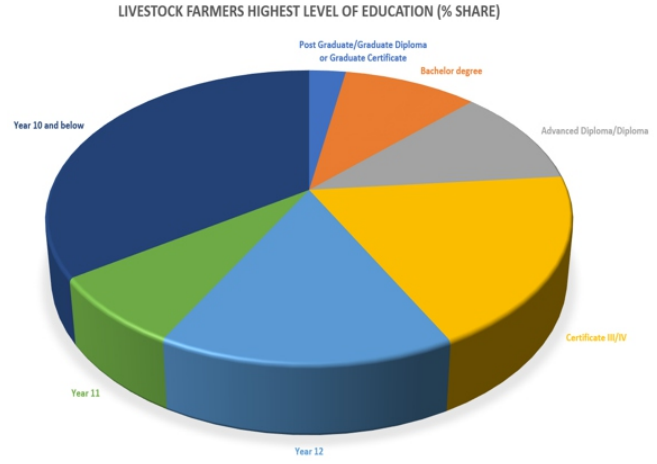


**Figure 5: Livestock Farmers Highest Level of Education (% Share).**

**Table 5: Livestock Farmers Highest Level of Education (% Share), ABS Census 2016, Customised Report. Highest qualification completed by workers in this job (in any field of study). Qualifications needed by new workers might be different from the qualifications of workers already in the job. Cited in Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business. (2020b).**

| Type of Qualification | Livestock Farmers | All Jobs Average |
|---|---|---|
| Post Graduate/Graduate Diploma or Graduate Certificate | 2.7 | 10.1 |
| Bachelor degree | 9.9 | 21.8 |
| Advanced Diploma/Diploma | 10.9 | 11.6 |
| Certificate III/IV | 19.0 | 21.1 |
| Year 12 | 15.4 | 18.1 |
| Year 11 | 7.7 | 4.8 |
| Year 10 and below | 34.5 | 12.5 |

The AHC30116 Certificate III in Agriculture qualification provides a general vocational outcome in agriculture and develops safe working practices in those who complete it. The qualification enables individuals to select a livestock production, cropping or livestock context as a job focus or, in the case of mixed farming enterprises, both cropping and livestock (Australian Government (2020b). The qualification from the onset includes a unit of competency, AHCWHS301 Contribute to work health and safety processes, that establishes competence in work health and safety. Aside from the 2 core units, 14 electives can be selected, including units such as AHCMOM304 Operate machinery and equipment, AHCMOM305 Operate specialised machinery and equipment AHCMOM202 Operate tractors and AHCMOM217 Operate quad bikes, which focus on the main mechanisms of injury fatality identified for workers in this industry. Upskilling Agricultural workers in a qualification such as AHC30116 Certificate III in Agriculture may contribute to reduction of workplace incidents.

At the very least, agricultural workers need to develop competence to: remove risks where they can; where they can't remove the risk, substitute, isolate or use engineering controls; set up administrative systems to manage the risks; use personal protective equipment, like helmets, gloves or protective boots and clothes; and review controls regularly to make sure they are working (Worksafe Victoria, 2020). Certificate III programs embed the skills and knowledge to do so.

**Industrial Manslaughter:**

As we enter an era of industrial manslaughter legislation, employers are encouraged to seriously consider the value of upskilling their staff, particularly in the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing and Transport, Postal and Warehousing industries, or those who generally employ Machinery Operators, Drivers and Labourers.

Ashurst (2020) outline that currently Industrial manslaughter laws are currently in place in Queensland and the ACT and Industrial manslaughter laws are proposed for introduction in Victoria and the Northern Territory. Further, the possible introduction of industrial manslaughter laws is being discussed in Western Australia. In Victoria, the new laws will commence on a day to be proclaimed or 1 July 2020 at the latest and negligent conduct before the legislation commences may still be relevant for the purposes of prosecution if an organisation's omission to amend unsafe work policies causes a workplace fatality post-commencement (Clayton UTZ, 2020).

Morris and Carnell (2019) explain that the industrial manslaughter offence usually applies where there has been negligent, or grossly negligent, conduct causing death. By drafting the offence as an outcome-based offence (i.e. it is triggered by a specific event, a workplace death), legislators seem to have moved away from the existing approach for safety law offences, which are mostly limited to providing for risk-based offences in relation to conduct that exposes a person to a risk of death or serious injury or illness, rather than for a specific outcome (a workplace death).

There are a number of activities that Clayton UTZ (2020) recommend in order to ensure they are ready for the new legislation. These include reviewing all the potential hazards and risks in the workplace, including mental health risks and ensuring that these are incorporated in the WHS/OHS approach and completing a formal review of all the safety systems and controls currently in place and ensure they are fully effective (including a mental health risk assessment and compliance plan). Also, reviewing all existing policies including "unwritten practices" relating to health and safety, reviewing WHS/OHS leadership and culture to ensure that any alleged negligent conduct is not authorised or permitted by the company or culture and education and awareness for directors, senior officers and managers on the new legislation and offences. Ongoing staff training is central to any preparation and WHS/OHS system. Provision of ongoing and sufficient training contributes to the development of a safety culture and can lead to a culture of compliance.

**Incentives for Employers:**

As an employer, there are a number of financial incentives of up to $10,000 (GST inclusive) to help employers increase their workforce. Wage subsidies are available to employers if they hire eligible job seekers including young people, mature age, long-term unemployed, Indigenous, or parents (Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, 2020c). These wage subsidies are available through an employment services provider.

Similar specific program incentives could be implemented for employers in the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing and Transport, Postal and Warehousing industries for upskilling of employees to Certificate III and Certificate IV level programs delivered in collaboration with Registered Training Organisations, whether TAFE, enterprise based, or Private Providers. Australian Government, as a stakeholder to health and safety, could in this way show commitment to promoting health and safety and reducing the occurrence of workplace incidents.

Likewise, employee incentives could be offered to individual employees who complete additional training to encourage them to upskill. Individual employee incentives provide for a range of additional benefits including employee motivation, building loyalty and strengthening work relationships.

Incentives provided by employers to their employees to undertake nationally recognised and structured training do not necessarily need to be monetary in their nature. Monetary incentives can include profit sharing plans, paid time off, bonuses and cash awards. However, alternative non-monetary rewards such as flexible work hours, training opportunities and the ability to work independently can be equally effective. In either case, the rewards and incentives are valuable to an employee because they allow workers to learn new skills and pursue advancement opportunities (Scott, 2019). In turn, the employer benefits from a safer and more skilled workforce.

**Role of Industry Skills Councils:**

Industry Skills Councils are recognised and funded by the Australian Government, governed by independent, industry led boards and not-for-profit companies limited by guarantee (iVET, 2020). Their formal roles include actively supporting the development, implementation and continuous improvement of high quality training and workforce development products and services including Training Packages and providing independent skills and training advice to enterprises, including matching identified training needs with appropriate training solutions.

As an example of the functions of an Industry Skills Council, Australian Industry Standards (AIS) is a government-funded, not-for-profit organisation working with industry leadership with an aim to ensure Training Packages are contemporary, future-focused and aligned with industry needs. Within AIS, the Transport and Logistics Industry Reference Committee has been assigned responsibility for the TLI Transport and Logistics Training Package components relating to Road Transport, Logistics, Warehousing and Ports. It role then, is to ensure that training package units of competency and qualifications are aligned to industry needs. As such, Australian Industry Standards is well placed to promote the benefits of skilling and upskilling through nationally recognised training products to a broad range of stakeholders. Likewise, they are well placed to provide advice to Government bodies responsible for the provision of training funds.

Industry skills councils must take an active role of promotion of suitable training products to reduce the high occurrence of fatality in high risk occupations.

**CONCLUSION:**

Given the high incidence of fatality and injury in the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing and Transport, Postal and Warehousing industries, there is an established need for additional training to occur in these industries. Training at Certificate III and certificate IV level is designed to impart the knowledge and skills needed to safely undertake work in the noted high risk occupations such as truck drivers and laborers.

Encouraging participation in vocational education and training programs should be a priority and responsibility of a range of industry stakeholders. The relevant Industry skills Councils, including the Transport and Logistics Industry Skills Council and the AgriFood Industry Skills Council, as representatives and stakeholders in both education and training and industry, need to actively and directly promote upskilling of existing workers to employers. This includes highlighting the benefits of training, the employer's legal obligations under health and safety legislation and the range of training options available. Employers are able to encourage upskilling within their existing worker cohort by providing a range of incentives to do so. Government, likewise, could provide incentives to employers to do so.

The Vocational Education and Training system is designed to provide suitable training in high risk occupations, however, these are under-utilised in industry. Use of the system as intended, would reduce the occurrence of workplace injuries and fatalities as those at risk would develop the competence to undertake their work safely and to the required industry standards.

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